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RONALD J. DUNLAVEY

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ELECTION YEAR

ANNCR: FOREIGN POLICY IS BECOMING AN IMPORTANT ISSUE IN THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION---AND THAT FACT CAN POSE PROBLEMS BOTH HERE AND ABROAD. VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE SUBJECT:

VOICE:

AT A NEWS CONFERENCE THURSDAY, BEFORE HE LEFT FOR AFRICA, SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER WAS ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ON THE CONDUCT OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY. THE EXCHANGES WHICH FOLLOWED---BETWEEN MR. KISSINGER AND HIS QUESTIONERS---INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH CONCERN ABOUT FOREIGN POLICY IS RUNNING NOT TOO FAR BEHIND THE STATE OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AS A CAMPAIGN ISSUE.

IN A NUTSHELL, WHAT HAS HAPPENED IS THAT THE FORD ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF WEAKNESS IN FOREIGN POLICY--OF NOT KEEPING THE COUNTRY'S MILITARY DEFENSES AT AN ADEQUATE LEVAL, OF PERMITTING DETENTE TO BECOME A ONE-WAY STREET FAVORING THE SOVIET UNION, OF FAILING TO REACT STRONGLY TO SOVIET MOVES IN AFRICA, AND OF NEGLECTING UNITED STATES INTERESTS IN THE PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS. SOME OF THIS CRITICISM HAS COME FROM CANDIDATES LIKE SENATOR HENRY JACKSON, WHO SEEK THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S NOMINATION. BUT EVEN MORE OF IT HAS COME FROM RONALD REAGAN, THE FORMER GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA, WHO IS SEEKING TO WREST THE REPUBLICAN NOMINATION FROM PRESIDENT FORD.

THE ADMINISTRATION HAS BOTH DEFENDED ITSELF AND COUNTER-ATTACKED. PRESIDENT FORD HIMSELF HAS DENIED THE ALLEGATIONS OF MILITARY WEAKNESS AND OF SOFTNESS IN NEGOTIATIONS, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ACCUSING GOVERNOR REAGAN OF IRRESPONSIBILITY. AND SECRETARY KISSINGER, AT THURSDAY'S NEWS CONFERENCE, INSISTED

THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD CONTINUE ON WHAT HE CALLED ITS "TWO-TRACK" POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION---TO RESIST EXPANSIONIST MOVES AND IRRESPONSIBLE ACTIONS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME TO CONTINUE WORKING FOR A BETTER RELATIONSHIP. HE CONCEDED THAT IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR THERE IS ALWAYS A TENDENCY AWAY FROM DRAMATIC NEW FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES THAT MIGHT BE CONSTRUED AS HAVING A PARTISAN POLITICAL MOTIVATION. BUT, HE SAID, THE BASIC AND WELL-ESTABLISHED POLICIES---INCLUDING THE SEARCH FOR A STRATEGIC ARMS AGREEMENT WITH THE SOVIET UNION--- WILL BE PURSUED, ELECTION YEAR OR NOT.

AS HE HAS DONE ON OTHER OCCASIONS, SECRETARY KISSINGER EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT ACCUSATIONS OF AMERICAN MILITARY WEAKNESS AND FAILURE OF WILL MAY GIVE THE WRONG IMPRESSION ABROAD-- LEADING TO THE ERRONEOUS CONCLUSION THAT THE UNITED STATES LACKS EITHER THE POWER OR THE CONVICTION TO ACT DECISIVELY WHEN NECESSARY. (OPT.) THIS SAME CONCERN WAS ECHOED IN A RECENT ARTICLE BY CHARLES YOST, FORMER UNITED STATES AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS. LEBELLING ACCUSATIONS OF MILITARY WEAKNESS AS "POLITICAL QUACKERY," MR. YOST WROTE: "WITHOUT LIFTING A FINGER OR USING A WEAPON, THE SOVIET UNION MIGHT OVER TIME ACHIEVE CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL ADVANTAGE IN EUROPE AND THE THIRD WORLD FROM THOSE WHO, ERRONEOUSLY, MIGHT THINK THE UNITED STATES WAS WEAK OR IMPOTENT." (END OPT) AT THE SAME TIME, MR. KISSINGER ADDED THAT HE THOUGHT OTHER COUNTRIES KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT AMERICAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS TO REALIZE THAT CANDIDATES--AS HE PUT IT--- "SOMETIMES GET CARRIED AWAY BY THE EXUBERANCE OF THEIR SPEECH WRITERS." NO DOUBT, CRITICISM OF THE FORD ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICY WILL CONTINUE, FOR THERE ARE THOSE WHO FEEL STRONGLY THAT IT IS DEFICIENT IN MANY WAYS. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT,

IN SITTING IN JUDGEMENT ON THIS DEBATE, OBSERVERS BOTH HERE AND ABROAD SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THIS IS AN ELECTION YEAR, AND TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE REALITIES AND THE EXAGGERATIONS.

PCA/GH